ROTHBURY RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

Annual Report of Dr.S.S.Hedley, Medical Officer of Health for the year 1953

To the Members of the Rothbury Rural District Council.
I beg to present my report for the year 1953.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH LIBRARY

STATISTICS.

The estimated mid-year population of the Rural District is 5567, an increase of seven compared with the previous year.

The number of births was 199, excluding 2 still-births. Of these 98 were from other districts, leaving 101 belonging to the district. Omitting the births from other districts, the birth-rate per 1,000 of the population was 18.0, the rate for England and Wales being 15.5. There were two still-births and 13 illegitimate births registered. One hundred and eighty five births occurred at the Coquetdale Cottage Hospital, 25 more than in 1953, a fine record.

The number of deaths registered was 79. Of these 67 were registered in Rothbury and 12 in other districts where the deaths took place.

The death rate was 14.1 per 1,000; that for England and Wales being 11.4. One infant died under one year of age. There was no death due to pregnacy, childbirth or abortion. There was no death due to measles or whooping cough. There were two deaths due to accident, one domestic the other following a motor vehicle accident. There was one case of suicide. Twentyfive persons died between the ages of 70 and 80, 19 between 80 and 90 and two ninety and over.

The chief causes of death were:- Diseases of the heart and blood vessels 47, cancer 12.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Forty-three cases were notified for the year compared with 140 in 1952, a decrease of 97. Classification was as follows:-

Scarlet fever	15	Erysipelas	2
Pneumonia	13	Measles	1
Whooping Cough	11	Dysentery	1

Total 43

There was no notification of polio-myelitis. One patient died of influenzal pneumonia.

TUBERCULOSIS

Only one case was added to my register in 1953 and this was that of a man transferred from Chathill to Whittingham. Twenty-seven cases remained on the register at the end of the year thirteen males and 14 females. Twenty two are pulmonary and five non-pulmonary.

SEWERAGE, WATER-SUPPLY & HOUSING.

On these points the Sanitary Inspectpr, Mr.Oliver, has again supplied me with the following report for which I am exceedingly grateful:-

Water Supplies:

All water supplies under the direct control of the Council have again been satisfactory. Your Consulting Engineers prepared a scheme to cover the major portion of the District and this was submitted to the Ministry. At the Ministry's request a deputation visited London so that a more detailed examination of the scheme be made. No firm decision was reached during the year. No major extensions to water mains have been made other than to houses under construction.

Sewerage: The conversion of the 30 privies at Embleton Terrace has now been carried out. One grant of financial assistance was given to a private owner for privy conversion. No starting date has yet been given for the sewage disposal scheme at Whittingham and Longframlington

Housing: During the year 18 houses were built by the Council and 7 by private owners. Advantage of financial assistance towards improvements of houses under the Housing Act of 1949 was taken in 30 cases making a total of 68 since the inception of the scheme. There is still a steady demand for houses in various parts of the district and steps are being taken to acquire the necessary sites.

Hotels and Public Houses: With your Medical Officer an inspection we made of the toilet facilities of all the premises and owners attention drawn to deficiencies and improvements required.

COMMENTS:

The Coronation Year of 1953 was not a success from the weather point of view. It came in like a lion and continued in that role until the last two or three months of the year when it tried to make some amends. Lord Byron's idea of English weather was nearly confirmed when he said in one of his poems" the English winter ending in July to recommence in August" but it did not affect the public health in this district.

The outstanding feature of this report is the increasing number of deaths, many of them tragically sudden, due to diseases of the heart and blood vessels; an increase of 10 on 1952 figures, or a share of 47 out of a total of 79. Frequently all the deaths registered in the four weeks are due to this disease. How true it is that a man is as old as his arteries. There is no doubt that the worry and stress of the war years has had something to do with this increase but the 9 years of so called peace has done nothing to reduce it. Again the span of human life is increasing and more persons are living to an age when diseases of this nature are most common.

Infectious Diseases notified show a decrease of 97. This very considerable fall in numbers is due firstly to the fact that we had no epidemic in 1953 and secondly to the fact that new drugs chief penicillin have largely got control in the treatment of many of the common infectious diseases. Pneumonia, scarlet fever, erysipelas and others are not rgearded with the seriousness of former times. Diphtheria has not been heard of for more than 10 years thanks to immunisation which I am glad to say has been consistently practised in this District. Measles and Whooping Cough are still troublesome and will be until a preventative vaccine is discovered.

The cancer figure (12) is one more than in 1952 and our annual average for the last ten years is now between 9 and 10. Early diagnosis is of the utmost importance so that in suitable cases surgical treatment may be applied before secondary deposits occur in other organs.

The single Tuberculosis case notified for 1953 is very satisfactory and much below our average for the last ten years namely 7.2. Here again the success of the treatment depends almost entirely on early diagnosis and the onset is very insidious.

In conclusion I would say that I think the public health of the district was distinctly improved in the last twenty five years or so and that improvement is largely due to the Dentist's work. I can easily recall the time when pyorrhoea (septic gums) was wide-spread in this district. In those days with non resident dentist in the district and no buses on the road it was a difficult and costly arrangement to visit a dentist's surgery, and so the poisonous condition of the mouth was allowed to run its course. And now it is rare to hear of a septic tooth, thanks largely to the dentist's forceps. In my green and salad days I was frequently requested to extract a tooth, and I think I must have done the operation thoroughly as no patient ever returned with a similar request. I think the patients must have felt (in the literal sense of the word) that they had had quite sufficient for the fee they paid - one shilling per tooth.

Signed A.S. HEDLEY.